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RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA PRIORITY 6686
RUEHUM/AMEMBASSY ULAANBAATAR PRIORITY 0010
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [ETTC](#) [KOMC](#) [MG](#) [UP](#) [CY](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: DEALING WITH TURKISH SUSPICIONS REGARDING US ARMS
SHIPMENTS TO IRAQ

REF: A. STATE 108929
[1](#)B. ANKARA 2247 AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)C. ANKARA 1913
[1](#)D. ANKARA 1976
[1](#)E. ANKARA 1464

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROSS WILSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Rising PKK violence and the leakage of potentially thousands of US-procured weapons from Iraq have heightened Turkish government and public sensitivities about the transfer of weapons to Iraq. Delays and confusion as we attempted to provide the GOT with information on the origin and destination of Iraq-bound military equipment aboard the MV Slavyanin (later MV Oniks) raised GOT suspicions to the point where Turkey threatened to interfere with the vessels and requested high-level, written assurances from us. This could easily happen again. While asserting our right to provide military equipment to Iraq, we must be prepared to address reasonable Turkish concerns quickly and accurately. We must also keep the Turks apprised of controls and safeguards being put into place to prevent the diversion of weapons provided to Iraqi forces to the PKK or other terrorist groups. This will also be key to gaining Turkish cooperation in monitoring and even stopping arms shipments involving Iran, Syria, and regional terrorist groups. End Summary.

Concern Over Arms Leakage from Iraq

[1](#)2. (C) Continued PKK attacks against Turkish military and civilian targets in the southeast as well as urban areas, and the routine discovery by Turkish security forces of weapons originating from US-provided stocks in Iraq in the hands of PKK terrorists, feed a popular perception here that the US is either directly or indirectly arming PKK terrorists. Turkish officials strongly believe that Kurdish authorities in northern Iraq are complicit in supplying arms and equipment to the PKK and believe many of these weapons come from US-procured stocks in Iraq (ref b). Open source reporting on accountability problems with US materiel supplied to Iraq since 2003 (including tens of thousands of small arms) have

led to grave concerns here about our ability to control leakage of weapons to Turkey, where they have already been used in several high-profile attacks.

13. (C) As a result, Turkey is scrutinizing tenders for supplying the Iraqi military as well as actual shipments of materiel to Iraq that come through the Bosphorus or eastern Mediterranean. D/CHOD GEN Ergin Saygun questioned us June 6 about a proposed FMS sale of large quantities of weapons, ammunition, and explosives to Iraq (ref e), expressing skepticism that the Iraqi government could control such materiel. At the same time, he expressed concern about a Danish firm working with a US company to provide bullet-proof vests and large amounts of ammunition directly to the "Kurdistan Security Forces."

14. (C) Turkish authorities have demonstrated a willingness to intervene in suspect shipments. Foreign Ministry officials told us their intervention compelled a ship carrying Albanian-origin arms for Armenia to turn back this summer.

Late Assurances for the Slavyanin and Onyx

15. (C) In the case of the Slavyanin/Onyx, the Turks identified the cargo of BMPs and AT-4 mounts as the Slavyanin transited the Bosphorus. They were particularly concerned about the AT-4 weapons systems and feared that the actual anti-tank missiles and warheads were included. Delays in our ability to confirm to the Turks that the cargo was US-owned and did not contain missiles or ammunition increased GOT unease and caused the Slavyanin to be listed as a suspect vessel by NATO/Operation Active Endeavor for a period of time. The Turks watched with growing concern as the ship

broke down, headed to Limassol (in problematic Cyprus) for repairs, and ultimately transferred its cargo to the Mongolian-flagged Oniks. Turkish authorities expressed particular concern over the apparent lack of knowledge on the part of senior Iraqi officials concerning this shipment. In fact, the MFA claimed, Iraqi authorities at first denied all knowledge of the vessel and its cargo and recommended the Turks simply seize it.

16. (C) Confusion over the Slavyanin, as well as delays in confirming to the Turks that Slavyanin's cargo was subsequently transferred to the MV Oniks in Limassol, raised Turkish suspicions to the point where both MFA U/S Apakan and D/CHOD GEN Saygun convoked the Ambassador several times and called late at night to express concerns on this subject. They requested written assurances from Washington officials not only of the origin and ownership of the cargo, but its end use and safeguards in place to prevent its diversion to terrorists (ref d). Our inability to provide the GOT with straight answers to its legitimate questions in light of arms diversion issues that have affected Turkey and US-Turkish relations has further eroded our credibility here, especially as we subject Turkey to extensive end use monitoring and other statutory restrictions on use of US military equipment that it procures.

17. (S) Turkish suspicions were not allayed by our support of an October 3 French request that Turkey inspect cargo aboard the MV Neptune. Turkish officials told us later that the French information, and by association ours, lacked credibility in that case. (Note: It may be useful to brief the GOT on our findings from the inspection of cargo aboard the MV Neptune in Greece, if it turns out to be illicit. End Note). If we expect Turkish cooperation on monitoring and stopping arms transfers between Iran, Syria, and terrorist groups in the area, we must take Turkish concerns seriously.

18. (C) While protecting our right to arm and equip Iraqi forces as we and the Iraqis see fit, we must be prepared to address reasonable Turkish concerns. The Slavyanin/Onyx experience indicates that we need to be ready to provide a quick and convincing answer to the Turks on particular shipments. Iraqi authorities should be prepared to do the same to the extent they have visibility over such transfers.

Over the longer term, keeping the Turks informed about the safeguards and controls we are establishing over the use and transfer of lethal US-origin equipment in Iraq will help ease their concerns. The Turks must also realize that the GOI, as a sovereign nation, has the right to procure military equipment from non-US sources and that we have no control over the GOI's use or disposition of that equipment.

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